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**Public Testimony Before the Joint Appropriations Committee
Re: CT Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired
Friday, March 4, 2011**

Senator Harp and Representative Toni Walker, Co-Chairs:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you and the Committee members about the Connecticut Commission on the Deaf and the Hearing Impaired (CDHI). I am Dr. Harvey J. Corson, Vice President of the Connecticut Association of the Deaf (CAD).

We understand that the State of Connecticut is facing a budget crisis in this present state of economy. The State sees a need to reduce the number of state agencies through consolidation and restructuring and manage the level of expenditures as reflected in the Governor's Proposed Budget for FY 2012 and FY 2013. As part of this process, it is proposed in the Governor's Bill #1012 to merge the CDHI into the Department of Social Services (DSS).

The following points are presented for your consideration:

1. Connecticut was the first state in the nation to establish this Commission, the kind of state agency to serve deaf and hard of hearing citizens. This became the role model for other states which subsequently established their state commissions/agencies.
2. CDHI is now in its 37th year of operation and has a commendable service history of providing critically needed interpreting, advocacy, counseling, and special telecommunications services to the deaf and hard of hearing community as well as to other state agencies, judicial system, hospitals, and educational agencies.
3. Deafness is a low incidence and invisible disability.
4. Deaf and hard of hearing citizens of this state recognize the CDHI as a viable, visible, and accessible state agency that can communicate with them. These citizens do identify the CDHI as their "state agency".
5. If such a proposed merger of the CDHI into the DSS be implemented as a part of the solution in resolving this budget crisis, we would like to strongly suggest that the proposed unit be renamed, Services to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (rather than Hearing Impaired), in order to be updated as presently commonly found in the names of service agencies in other states with the following recommendations:
 - a) the service functions continue as part of a cohesive unit within the DSS.
 - b) a qualified deaf director leads this unit, especially the one who can communicate, interact, and work with deaf, deaf-blind, and hard of hearing consumers.

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- c) the service location(s) and service delivery to be accessible and consumer-friendly to the deaf, deaf-blind, and hard of hearing consumers.
- d) the advisory board be reconstituted to include a 51% majority of deaf, deaf-blind, and hard of hearing citizens, and a representative from the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Disabled Persons (OPA) for meaningful and valuable input from the deaf and hard of hearing community, parents, and other agencies.

The Deaf Community of Connecticut wants to thank the State of Connecticut and you for your continued interest and support to this vital and needed statewide service to the deaf, deaf-blind, and hard of hearing citizens in this state.

Thank you.